English Key Literary Poetic Terms – Highlighted in Black!

To get to the literary terms, first go to the Ministry of ed. Web page: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/>

Literary Terms

**Alliteration: The repetition of sounds in nearby words involving the first consonant.**

**Eg. I went to the sweet silent sea.**

**Allusion: A reference to a literary or historical person, place, event, or to another literary work or passage.**

**Analogy: A comparison between things intended to show the similarities between them.**

**Antagonist: A force or person opposing the protagonist. An antagonist may also be a rival.**

**Argumentative Essay:**

**An assertive, brief composition which attempts to prove a thesis.**

Anecdotal Evidence:

Evidence based on personal experience that has not been tested.

Assonance: The repetition of vowel sounds ( a, e, i, o, u) in a line or series of lines in poetry.

Eg. Our echoes grow for ever and ever.

**Atmosphere: The mood or feeling of a literary work. Atmosphere is often developed through setting.**

Audience: The spectators, listeners or readers of an event, work of literature, or program.

# B

**Ballad: A story told in verse, often meant to be sung.**

Ballad Stanza: A quatrain, ( a four line stanza).

**Bias: An inclination or prejudice against a person, group or idea; a concentration on or interest**

**in one particular area or subject.**

**Blank Verse: Unrhymed iambic pentameter ( a light beat followed by a heavy beat, five times per line).**

**Of all the English verse forms it is the most fluid and comes closest to the natural rhythms of English speech. The following is an example from William Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey*:**

**With some uncertain notice, as might seem,**

**Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,**

**Or of some Hermit’s cave, where by his fire**

**C**

**Cacophony: The use of harsh and unmusical sounds. Eg. Trudge, sludge.**

**Caricature: The use of exaggeration or distortion to make a person or public figure appear comic or ridiculous.**

**Character: The qualities distinctive to an individual; the distinctive nature of something.**

**Characterization: The means by which a writer reveals the qualities of a character:**

**- through actions.**

**- through speech and thoughts.**

**- through physical description.**

**- through the opinions others have about the character**

**- through a direct statement by the author.**

**Character Foil: A person or thing that contrasts strongly with another and therefore makes the other's qualities more obvious.**

Chronological Order:

The order of a literary work based on time, on what happened first, second etc.

**Cliché: A phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought.**

**Climax: The point of greatest intensity or suspense in a narrative. It is the point when the protagonist is about to win or lose all.**

**Colloquialism: A word or phrase that is not formal and that is used in ordinary or familiar conversation.**

**Colloquial Language: The use of familiar or conversational language.**

**Comic relief: Humourous content in a dramatic or literary work intended to offset more serious episodes.**

**Compare and Contrast:**

**To find similarities and differences.**

**Comparison: A consideration or estimate of the similarities or dissimilarities between two things or people.**

**Conflict: A struggle between two opposing forces or characters in a work of literature. Conflict can be external or internal, and it can take one of these forms: (1) a person against another person; (2) a person against society; (3) a person against nature; ( 4) two elements within a person stuggling for control and mastery.**

**Connotation: The feelings suggested by a word or phrase. It is the opposite of dennotation which is the literal meaning of a word or phrase. In connotation the maple leaf may be symbolic of**

**Canada; in dennotation it literally is a leaf from the maple tree.**

**Consonance: The repetition of similar consonant sounds in a group of words. Alliteration is a form of consonance. Eg. I sometimes was sent overseas to the sweet silent sea.**

**Contrast: Compare in such a way as to emphasize differences. Eg. She was tall and contrasted to her older sister who was short.**

**Couplet: Two consecutive lines of poetry which rhyme:**

**I sailed over the ocean blue,**

**And came upon Zanadu.**

# D

Denotation: The literal or dictionary meaning of a word.

Denouement: The outcome of a plot in which all the conflict and mystery is explained or concluded.

Descriptive Essay: An essay that portrays people, places, things, moments and theories with enough vivid detail to help the reader create a mental picture of what is being written about.

Dialect: A form of language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group.

**Dialogue: The words in a conversation.**

Didactic: A form of poetry which has as its primary intention the teaching of some lesson or moral or the making of some critical statement about society.

**Dilemma: A difficult situation in which a choice has to be made between two or more undersirable alternatives.**

Dissonance: A combination of discordant or harsh sounds.

Drama: A play for theatre, radio, or television.

**Dramatic irony: A situation where a reader or an audience becomes aware of something that a character in the story or play does not know.**

Dynamic character: A character who undergoes a change during the course of the narrative, be it from good to bad, bad to good, bad to worse etc.

# E

**Editorial: An article expressing the editor’s opinion.**

Elegy: A poem of mourning, usually over the death of an individual.

Emotional appeal: An attempt to persuade an audience or reader by appealing to emotion.

Epic: A long narrative poem telling about the deeds of a great hero.

Epiphany: A moment of significant illumination or insight.

**Euphemism: A mild expression or indirect word substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt.**

Euphony: Sounds which are pleasing to the ear.

Exposition: A comprehensive explanation of an idea or theory in a piece of writing.

Expository essay: The function of the expository essay is to explain a body of knowledge.

**Extended metaphor: A metaphor ( a comparison of two things that are dissimilar) which is extended throughout a piece of literature.**

**External conflict: The conflict a character undergoes between other characters, nature, fate.**

**F**

**Fable: A brief story told to present a moral or practical lesson.**

**Falling action: The action in a narrative which occurs after the climax.**

**Figurative language: Language that is not intended to be interpreted in a literal sense. Figurative language**

**includes such figures of speech as** **hyperbole, metaphor, metonomy, oxymoron, personification and simile.**

**First Person point of view: In the first person point of view the story is told by one of the characters in his or her own words using “I”.**

Flashback: A scene in a narrative that interrupts the action to show an event that happened earlier.

**Flat character: A flat character is presented only in outline without much individualizing detail, and so can readily be described in a single phrase or sentence.**

**Foil: A person or thing that contrasts strongly with another and therefore makes the other's qualities more obvious.**

**Foreshadowing: In a narrative, the use of hints or clues to suggest what will happen later.**

Form: The literary shape of a piece of literature, be it poetry, prose, essay or drama.

**Formal language: Language in writing or speaking characterized by conservative and/or technical words.**

Free verse: Verse that has either no metrical pattern or an irregular pattern.

**H**

**Hyperbole: A figure of speech using exaggeration, or overstatement, for special effect.**

**I**

**Iambic pentameter: A poetic line consisting of five verse feet with each foot an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable as in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*:**

**“Too well I see and rue the dire event,”**

Idiom: A form of expression or group of words natural to a language, person, or group of people; the dialect of a part of a country as in *over the moon* or *see the light*.

**Image: A word or sequence of words that refers to a sensory experience.**

**Imagery: Words or phrases that create pictures or images in the reader’s mind as in D.H. Lawrence’s poem Snake, “ In the deep, strange-scented shade of he great dark**

**carob-tree”**

**Informal language: Relaxed, unofficial words.**

**Internal conflict: The conflict a character has within him or herself.**

**Internal rhyme: Rhyme which occurs within a line, “What is the reason for each season.”**

**Irony: A contrast between what is stated and what is really meant, or between what is expected and what actually happens.**

**J**

**Jargon: Special words or expressions used by a particular profession or group.**

**Juxtaposition: Purposely placing close together to contrast such as placing black and white photos beside colour photos.**

**L**

**Limited omniscient: The third-person narrator tells the story from only one character. In omniscient the narrator can comment on any or all of the characters.**

**Literal language: Taking words in their most basic sense without metaphor or exaggeration.**

Lyric: A poem, usually a short one, that expresses a speaker’s personal thoughts or feelings. Originally the lyric was a poem to be sung; many contemporary lyrics have retained this melodic quality. The **elegy, ode, and sonnet** are all forms of the lyric.

**M**

**Metaphor: A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two things that are basically dissimilar. The simile “George is like a mad dog when angry” is a comparison using like; the same idea in a metaphor is “George is a mad dog when angry.”**

Metonomy: A figure of speech in which something very closely associated with a thing is used to stand for or suggest the thing itself. A **hardhat** is used to mean a construction worker. Metonomy is closely related to syndecdoche where a word is substituted for the whole, where a word like “**hands**” is used to stand for people.

**Monologue: A speech by one actor in a play or film.**

**Mood: The atmosphere or pervading tone of a piece of literature, be it sullen, mysterious, angry**.

**N**

**Narrative: A piece of literature that tells a story.**

**Narration: The act of giving a spoken or written account of a story.**

**Narrator: One who narrates, or tells, a story. The word narrator can also refer to a character in a drama who guides the audience through the play, often commenting on the action.**

**O**

**Objective point of view: The author tells the story, in the third person, but avoids including any thoughts or feelings and focuses only on what the characters say or do.**

Ode: A complex and often lengthy lyric poem, written in a dignified formal style on some serious or lofty subject. Odes are often written for a special occasion or to honour a person or season.

**Omniscient point of view: The narrative is written in the third person point of view and the thoughts and feelings of more than one character are given.**

**Onomatopoeia: The use of a words whose sounds seem to resemble the sounds they describe, such as “buzz,” “bang,” “hiss.”**

**Oxymoron: A figure of speech that combines opposite or contradictory ideas or terms, such as “sweet sorrow,” or “wise fool.”**

**P**

**Paradox: A situation or a statement that seems to contradict itself, but on closer inspection, does not.**

Parallelism: The use of phrases, clauses, or sentences that are similar or complementary in structure or in meaning. A repetition of sentences using the same structure.

Pathos: The quality in a work of art that arouses the reader’s feelings of pity, sorrow, or compassion for a character.

Personal essay: A short piece of writing in

**Personification: A figure of speech in which something nonhuman is given human qualities.**

Persuasive essay: The purpose of **persuasive** essay is to convince a reader. A good writer may present emotional as well as rational appeal.

Persuasive technique: The author uses the techniques of persuasion including appeals to emotion, use of statistics, quotes from experts and graphic representations.

**Plot: The sequence of events in a narrative.**

**Point of view: The vantage point from which a narrative is told. There are two basic points of view: first person and third person ( omniscient ).**

Propaganda: Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view. The appeals are to the emotion and are designed to convince and persuade groups or individuals to action.

**Protagonist: The central character of a drama, short story, or narrative poem.**

**Proverb: A short, well-known saying stating a general truth or piece of advice.**

Purpose: The reason for which something is done or created. The purpose is the writer’s intention.

**Pun: The use of a word or phrase to suggest two or more meanings at the same time. Puns are generally humorous.**

**R**

Refrain: A word, phrase, line, or group of lines repeated regularly in a poem, usually at the end of each stanza.

**Repetition: The action of repeating something that has already been said or written**.

Research: The systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.

**Rhetorical question: A question which is asked in order to produce an effect or to make a statement rather than to elicit a response. A rhetorical question answers itself.**

**Rhyme: The repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to each other in a poem. For example: song/long, rung / sung.**

**Rhyme scheme: A rhyme scheme is a pattern of rhymes in a poem.**

Rhythm: The arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables into a pattern. Rhythm is most apparent in poetry, though it is a part of all good writing.

**Rising Action: The events of a dramatic or narrative plot which go before the climax.**

**Round Character: A round character is a complex and fully realized individual, and therefore is difficult to describe in one or two sentences.**

**S**

**Sarcasm: The use of irony to mock or convey contempt.**

Satire: The literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, or scorn.

**Setting: The time and place in which the events in a short story, novel, play or narrative poem occur.**

**Simile: A comparison of two things through the use of a specific word of comparison, such as like, as, than or resembles.**

**Slang: Words or phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than in writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people.**

**Soliloquy: In drama, an extended speech delivered by a character alone onstage.**

**Sonnet: A fourteen line lyric poem.**

**Speaker: As opposed to the author, it’s the person “telling” the poem.**

Stanza: A stanza is a division in the formal pattern of a poem.

Style: An author’s characteristic way of writing, determined by the choice of words, the

Static character: A static character does not change. A static character is the opposite of a dynamic character, who does change.

**Stereotype: A commonplace type or character that appears so often in literature that his or her nature is immediately familiar to the reader.**

**Stock/stereotyped character: Stereotypes, also called stock characters, always look and act the same way and reveal the same traits of character.**

Style: An author’s characteristic way of writing, determined by the choice of words, the arrangement of words in sentences, and the relationship of the sentences to one another.

**Symbol: An object, person, place, or action that has meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, such as a quality, an attitude, a belief, or a value.**

**Symbolism: The use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.**

Synecdoche: A figure of speech that substitutes a part for a whole. **Canada** won by a goal means the Canadian hockey team won.

**T**

**Theme: The general idea or insight about life that a writer wishes to express in a literary work.**

**Thesis: A thesis is a controlling idea or proposition in a literary work.**

**Thesis statement: A statement or theory put forward and supported by arguments.**

**Third person point of view: In the third person ( or omniscient ) point of view the author can describe and comment on all the characters inner thoughts and feelings.**

**Tone: The attitude a writer takes toward his or her subject, characters, or audience.**

**Tragedy: In general, a literary work in which the protagonist meets an unhappy or disastrous end.**

**U**

**Understatement: The presentation of something as being smaller or less good or important than it really is.**

**V**

Voice: The distinctive tone of style of a work or author.

**W**

Wit: The capacity for inventive thought and quick, keen understanding often with the intent of humour. Cleverness.